

Johnston County Natural Areas Inventory

CAMP ATKINSON HARDWOOD FOREST

Site Number: 9

Size: about 40 acres

Site Significance: County

Quadrangle: Flowers

Ownership: Girl Scouts of America

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: The natural area contains a good example, though small in acreage, of a Dry-Mesic Oak-Hickory Forest, along with a small example of Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest. A nature trail/hiking trail traverses a portion of the natural area. The Significantly Rare crested coralroot (*Hexalectris spicata*) was reported from this site in 1933, but it is likely no longer present.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The site lies about a mile south of the Little River Galax Bluffs natural area and is adjacent to the Little River Aquatic Habitat.

SITE DESCRIPTION: Camp Atkinson is a Girl Scout camp consisting of roughly 230 acres that was donated by Mary Atkinson several decades ago. The property contains numerous cabins and other buildings as part of the scout camp, along with a lake, lawns, and other facilities. A second lake, dammed by Atkinson Mill, lies along the lower end of Cattail Creek where it merges with the Little River. Forested slopes lie along Cattail Creek upstream of this lake, though in fall 1996 Hurricane Fran felled tens of thousands of trees there and elsewhere on the tract (according to the site manager).

The Owl Hollow Nature Trail departs the northern end of the developed area and extends into the upland hardwood forest adjacent to Cattail Creek. The lower portions of the forest contain Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest natural community, where American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) is the most common canopy tree. Wild azalea (*Rhododendron perichlymenoides*) is a very common shrub. Uncommon herbs in this community include axillary goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*) and smooth oak-leach (or false foxglove) (*Aureolaria flava*).

Farther upslope, and especially to the north, the ridges are dominated by mature stands of Dry-Mesic Oak-Hickory Forest. White oak (*Quercus alba*) is the primary canopy tree. Other widespread canopy trees here include mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), and American beech. Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) dominates the subcanopy. Relatively few shrubs are present, as most of this layer consists of saplings of tree species. Very few ericaceous shrubs are present, which is typical of forests of this community type; Dry Oak-Hickory Forests, on the other hand, feature a wide array of blueberries, huckleberries, and other ericaceous shrubs. Near the northern portion of the natural area, on a ridge extending northward toward the creek, are several very large white oaks and one very large post oak (*Q. stellata*). Herbs are sporadic throughout the forest, but notable species include striped gentian (*Gentiana villosa*), American lopseed (*Phryma leptostachya*), and broad beech fern (*Thelypteris hexagonoptera*).